

READING 1

Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), selections from chapter 10, "Connections."

Abstract: This essay explores the varieties of connections among peoples of the world before 1500. It looks generally at commercial, diplomatic, and religious connections between diverse areas of the world. In so doing, it suggests the reasons why so many individuals were motivated to make difficult and often perilous journeys across cultural frontiers. It also discusses some of the many changes that resulted from these diverse contacts.

The creation of empires and the spread of religion were, along with trade, the most important ways in which connections were established among peoples of the world both before and after 1500. Expanding networks of military, political, economic, and religious ties created connections among cultures and societies in Europe, Asia, and Africa at least as early as the time of the Roman (31 B.C.E.–476 C.E.) and Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) Empires.

Mapping the World

The development of scientific cartography (mapping) was crucial to navigation across long distances for purposes of trade, exploration, and the spread of religion. Cartography was related to the sciences of the heavens, and the most famous astronomer-cartographer of the ancient Mediterranean world was Ptolemy (fl. 127–151), the librarian of Alexandria, the center of the Egyptian and Greek community. Ptolemy devised maps of the world that provided a general picture of the relationships of the known oceans and landmasses. Ptolemy was the first to use parallels (of latitude) and meridians (of longitude) in his mapping, and his maps of the world were the best transmitted to medieval Europe from antiquity. Ptolemy was aware that the world was round, but errors, such as his underestimate of the circumference of the globe, hindered the practical use of his geography. However, Ptolemy's miscalculations did have one practical effect: they encouraged Columbus, who, based on information from Ptolemy, greatly underestimated the distance westward to the Indies. Geographers elsewhere, from Africa to China, produced far more accurate descriptions in both narrative and cartographic forms.

Around the time of Ptolemy, the rise of religious cosmography (representations of the cosmos) in Europe retarded the development of scientific cartography. According to Christian cosmology, the world was represented as a disk symbolizing the relationship of man to heaven, and the

grid system of coordinates mapping the world in parallels and meridians was abandoned. Just as this was occurring in Europe, a cartographer-astronomer and seismologist named Zhang Heng (78–139) made use of a grid system to map the world. Although religious cosmography in East Asia also played a role in the creation of maps constructed on the basis of religious ideas, Zhang Heng's grid provided an independent, standardized framework for Chinese maps from his time forward to the present day.

Religious cosmography dominated Arab cartography until the world map of the North African scholar al-Idrisi (1099–1166). This sophisticated world map was made in the mid-twelfth century for the Norman ruler of Sicily, Roger II (r. 1132–1154), who was known for his interest in foreign ideas and institutions, particularly the Chinese civil service examination system. Al-Idrisi's map was drawn in the Ptolemaic tradition, based on a grid system that resembled Chinese grid maps, extant examples of which can be dated to the mid-twelfth century. It is not clear how the Ptolemaic tradition was transmitted or to what extent Chinese influence played a role in the revival of scientific cartography in Europe, but by around 1300 sea charts were in use in the Mediterranean, testimony to the reintroduction of scientific cartography based on the use of the mariner's compass, which became known in Europe just before 1200.

Commercial Connections

Traders made up the largest number of world travelers. By the second century, travel by ship and caravan was adequate for both regional and long-distance commerce. Trade moved steadily through a series of regional exchanges between West Africa and East Asia and culminated in large markets where both ordinary and exotic goods were traded. Along the lines of communication connecting Asia and Africa with the Mediterranean coast, basic types of ship and sail construction, as well as navigation and caravaning routes and practices, were commonly known and used, regions borrowing from one another and each using what suited it best.

Between 100 and 500 C.E., the camel, the "ship of the desert," was introduced to the Sahara from West Asia via Egypt. The use of the camel was an innovation in African overland trade equivalent to improvements in maritime technology. The camel led to faster, more frequent, and more regular commerce. Bred in different sizes and structures for different terrains, the standard one-hump camel could carry loads of up to 250 kilograms (550 pounds) while traveling more than a week without water. Sometimes described as a difficult and disagreeable pack animal, those who used camels paid homage to them in poems and essays by extolling their beauty, gentleness, speed, and patience or by comparing the human experience to that of the animals, as in this northeast African love poem by the Somali poet Maxamed Good:

Unless I see you I never get nourishment from sleep
Like a young camel I bellow out to you
I am to you as a she-camel is to her adopted calf when her own has been killed.

Other poetry, such as this excerpt from a poem by the Somali poet Axmed Ismaaciil Diiriye, reveals the realities of desert journeys:

The camels are packed and ready for the weary trek
And men's thoughts dwell on distant destinations.

By both land and sea, merchants moved luxury goods and commodities between towns, regions, and continents, delaying or changing their shipments according to shifting markets, wars, rumors, and weather. Driven by hopes of profit, they sought out trade items that might increase their wealth. Commodities in general demand, such as salt, which is essential to both humans and animals but is not readily available everywhere, were commonly traded in both regional and international commerce.

Trade Commodities

Salt

Until major improvements in production in the eighteenth century, governments commonly maintained monopolies on the production and trade of salt. As a major source of governments' finances, salt was politically and economically important. In some parts of the world, government monopolization of major salt deposits and the trade lines associated with them provided the basis for large regional empires. As early as the second century B.C.E., the Chinese government instituted a controversial domestic salt monopoly to direct profits from the production and sale of salt into state coffers. Centuries later, a revival of the salt monopoly contributed substantially to the fiscal health of the Tang imperial house and thus to prolonging its rule after domestic rebellion and foreign losses in the mid-eighth century. The prosperity and vigor of the fifteenth-century sub-Saharan empire of Borno was closely tied to its monopoly of the salt trade, which provided much of North Africa with its salt.

Horses

Everywhere, heavy and bulky items were generally confined to regional trade; only a few offered a large or certain enough profit to be moved regularly in long-distance trade. Governments' interest in trading such bulky items as horses, essential to effective cavalry in time of war, resulted in horse trading over both middle and long distances. For example, India was a major importer of horses from Central and West Asia and by the third century was regularly transshipping them to Indonesia. In the regions of West Africa where horses could survive, horse-mounted cavalry transformed states

politically and economically. West African states were able to control and monopolize interregional trade by controlling the breeding of horses (they sold only stallions).

Grain

Throughout the first millennium C.E., grain was a common middle-distance trading commodity. Because it was needed to feed the inhabitants of great cities such as second-century Rome, eighth-century Chang'an, and eleventh-century Cairo, each with a population of more than a million and without sufficient local access to grain supplies, the perishable food staple was intensively produced and traded from hinterlands of usually no more than one week's journey. The southern Mediterranean shores of North Africa were the initial granary for imperial Rome, while the Nile and Yangzi Valleys supplied Cairo and Chang'an.

The Luxury Trade

While many traders dealt in bulk goods, traversing the continents in long caravans or sailing along their coasts in lumbering ships, others dealt in smaller quantities of more profitable luxury goods. Of these the most common were fine ceramics, jewelry, woven and embroidered silks, incense, and spices. Manufactured goods originating in East, South, and Southeast Asia were traded into West Asia, Africa, and Europe in exchange for gold and silver. Caravan routes across the Sahara were established by African traders in salt, metals, and other commodities and across Central Asia by traders in silk. Around the seas, from the first centuries C.E., a string of ports of call marked routes from southern China down through the islands of Southeast Asia across the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea to Africa and West Asia.

The Spice Trade

Spices, arguably the most lucrative of the global luxury trade in the period between 100 and 1450, moved for the most part by sea. A world without refrigeration had powerful reasons to pay high prices for pepper, cloves, cumin, cinnamon, and nutmeg, all sources of strong flavors that masked the taste of overage meat and other perishables. Nearly all these items originated in India and the islands of Southeast Asia. Some were traded east and north to China for ceramics, silks, and other finished goods. Much of the spice trade throughout this period went as far west as the Mediterranean basin.

Merchants and International Trade

International traders and travelers, appearing to local people as foreigners with strange languages, customs, and goods, nearly always lived apart when they were in foreign lands. Cities around the world where trading took place had neighborhoods occupied exclusively by foreign traders and their

businesses. Arab merchants occupied special quarters in the medieval Chinese capital of Chang'an and in the southern port of Canton. Often the establishment of separate quarters was the result of a policy of the host government that was intended both to control the import and export of wealth and goods for its own benefit and to isolate new cultural ideas which might undermine the local belief system that legitimized government power. In western sub-Saharan Africa in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, cities such as Gao on the Niger River were constructed as double cities, one-half being for foreign traders. In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Christian Ethiopia, Muslims engaged in international trade were forced by the government to live in entirely separate market towns, while Muslim governments across North Africa enforced foreign merchant quarters in every large city from Fez in Morocco to Cairo in Egypt.

Merchant Associations

Merchant associations were another feature of world trade before 1500 that maintained connections and encouraged commerce in the centers and along the routes of exchange. Based sometimes on common kinship ties or ethnic background and sometimes on a commonly held legal system or shared religious outlook, these associations provided financial, legal, and logistical support that facilitated the enterprise and helped protect the commercial monopolies of their members.

Even before the voyages of exploration that were to shift the center of commercial activity and power to the Atlantic, world trade had become so large-scale and risky that individual mercantile enterprise had given way to complicated multiparty arrangements. The most common of these arrangements were partnerships. Nearly all these partnership arrangements, whether in Africa, East Asia, or Europe, began as arrangements between family and lineage members. They continued up through the fifteenth century as a common form of business organization all along world trade routes.

Partnerships

The terms of partnerships, which proportionally strengthened the wealth, responsibilities, and liabilities of enterprises, were also shaped by regional legal systems or customs and enforced by government authorities or by merchants themselves through their professional associations. In West Asia, North Africa, northern India, and Spain, where *mudarabah* partnerships emerged, Islamic law was applied by state governments after the eighth century. The *mudarabah* and its variations provided a contractual means by which unrelated individuals could pool large amounts of capital to outfit and supply long-term, long-distance caravans and fleets and share out the risk. Whether influenced by Islamic practice or emerging out of indigenous practices, *commenda* and *compagnia* partnerships, which offered similar

advantages, emerged in Europe by the twelfth century. Similar economically based power associations in West Africa helped unify the Mande-speaking peoples of Mali and contributed to the expansion of the Mali Empire in West Africa in the fourteenth century.

Lodges and Brotherhoods

In thirteenth- through fifteenth-century West Asia, the Muslim *futuwwa* lodge functioned like a modern businessmen's fraternal organization, complete with charitable activities. These organizations evolved from brotherhoods of men that sprang up in urban settings to provide protection for the interests of its members, who were often young and poor. By the thirteenth century, *futuwwa* lodges served the needs of the merchant class, especially in the Turkish and Persian territories of the Muslim world. A member merchant from western Anatolia could visit Aleppo or Baghdad and find a hostel there maintained by the lodge for its members; he would also find ready-made business connections among the local membership.

Similar lodges functioned in the same fashion in North and West Africa, where the *karimi* merchant society, headquartered in Cairo, flourished as early as the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Its membership was made up mostly of Jewish, but also of Muslim, long-distance traders who worked a commercial network that stretched from Spain to India. Arabic language and culture plus common business interests held this society together. Jewish members wrote their contracts in Arabic using Hebrew characters; among themselves they used Talmudic contract law, but with Muslim colleagues commonly accepted legal variations were practiced.

Money and International Exchange

International merchants — Malayan, African, Chinese, Arab, or European — were all knowledgeable in world monies and their exchange rates. Most trade was carried out through the bartering of one good for another. Even so, internationally understood units of money were needed. One of the earliest international currencies was gold-based. We know that African gold was traded to Europe and beyond as early as the fifth century, as evidenced by the gold coinages struck by Vandals and later Byzantines.

For international exchange, cowrie shells were the commonest form of currency as late as the twelfth century. Cowrie shells, actually several species including the *Cypraea moneta*, mined from the sea near the Maldives and with a limited distribution, were used in China for commercial purposes as early as the seventh century B.C.E. Cowries had the advantage of being durable, portable, and nearly impossible to counterfeit. Eighth-century Arabs, trading for gold in the western Sudan and ancient Ghana, found that African merchants demanded cowries in payment.

Government and Currency

By 1000 C.E., gold and silver coins became more common as international currency than cowries. In some parts of the world, other metals, such as lead, tin, or copper, were rarer, and their scarcity permitted their use as forms of currency. By assuming monopolies over both the mining and the production of valuable metals and by establishing the weight, degree of adulteration, and value of metal coins, large and small states throughout the world began to mint and control currency. This intrusion of government into commerce served as proof and publicity of political legitimacy and power as well as a convenient means for governments to accumulate capital and simplify tax collection. Some state currencies quickly became accepted as units of exchange thousands of miles distant from their origins. At the height of Abbasid power in Baghdad (ninth to eleventh centuries), their dinars (minted from African gold) and dirhems were commonly accepted throughout the Mediterranean, as well as in Central and South Asia and eastern Europe. By the fifteenth century, Florentine ducats had become the basic international currency in Europe.

Diplomatic Connections

Seeking to expand their bases of material and human resources, both large empires and smaller states sponsored missions to neighboring regions, sometimes to form military or trade alliances, sometimes to exchange gifts, but always to gather information about potential resources. Trade and diplomacy tended to go hand in hand.

Diplomatic communications were made difficult by each government's view of its own importance and by fundamental ideological as well as linguistic differences. To prevent the collapse of negotiations over misunderstandings, commonly accepted rules in matters of precedence and etiquette, and formalities in the recording and documentation of transactions with foreigners, developed. Every government developed its own protocol, the mastery of which was a prerequisite for any who wished to deal with it successfully. In the absence of a bureaucracy specializing in foreign affairs, the business of diplomatic missions, which might nominally be headed by a highly placed government official or an aristocrat, was typically carried out by those involved in trade or in government postal, road, and harbor systems or by the military, those most likely to be familiar with foreign places and governments through experience.

Han Chinese Diplomacy and Exploration

Zhang Qian, a Han ambassador, traveling on missions which began in 139 B.C.E., not only developed military and political intelligence of great use to Han policy but also had an eye for commercial opportunities. While in Bactria

about 128 B.C.E., Zhang Qian noticed for sale Chinese bamboo and textiles which came from southwest China by way of Bengal. This suggested to him the possibility of establishing safe roads from China to Bactria through India, thus protecting trade from the unfriendly peoples in Central Asia. His report on the famous horses of Ferghana inspired Han Wudi to send an expedition of 30,000 soldiers on a campaign to obtain them. Zhang Qian not only served Han diplomatic interests, he alerted Central Asian people to the possibilities of Chinese trade, and the resulting commercial relationships served to carry Chinese products west. The subsequent Western demand for Chinese silk and other products, and the Chinese interest in Western horses, had a powerful commercial and cultural impact on Eurasia.

Diplomatic Accounts as Historical Sources

Accounts by envoys to foreign lands provide some of the most important historical sources we have today. Megasthenes (fourth century B.C.E.) was posted by a successor of Alexander the Great, Seleucus Nicator, as an envoy to the court of the Mauryan ruler, Chandragupta, at Pataliputra. The book he wrote detailing his observations of Mauryan India has been lost, but later Greek and Latin writers drew on it and it remains the earliest description of India by an outsider. The Chinese official Zhou Daguan was appointed by the Mongol ruler of China in the late thirteenth century to represent him in Cambodia, and Zhou's accounts of Cambodian society are a valuable historical source. The mission of Friar William of Rubruck to the Mongols in the fourteenth century provides a unique perspective on Mongol life at that time.

Diplomacy and Culture

Diplomatic delegations linked one government to another. Their stays in a foreign land were normally brief; they traveled to initiate or confirm specific trade and political agreements between governments, although permanent embassies began to appear in the fifteenth century. For example, during the entire span of the Song dynasty (960–1275) in China, various diplomatic delegations were sent to negotiate with the rulers of border states that threatened the Song. The accounts of some of these delegations reveal much about how the Chinese viewed peoples they regarded culturally as “barbarians” but whose military strength seriously compromised the Song state. In Africa, the delegation of Mansa Musa, ruler of Mali (1312–1337), served multiple purposes: it was a religious pilgrimage, a trading venture, and a diplomatic mission to lands beyond Mali's borders, namely Mecca and Cairo.

Religious Connections

Traders and diplomats were by no means the only travelers maintaining international connections and cultural interchange in the centuries before European routes through the Americas to Asia were established. Pilgrims were far more numerous than diplomats as long-distance travelers on the world's highways. They were drawn from all walks of life; everyone participated. To go on pilgrimage was to visit sacred places where the spiritual and material worlds touched. In such places, distinctions of social status disappeared. Kings and commoners, slaves and slave owners, the poor and the rich were as one on pilgrimage. To emphasize this sense of commonality, many of the long-distance pilgrimages required standardized clothing.

Every culture in the world had its shrines, recognized and visited by its people as centers of power. Some were in sacred groves of trees, as in the case of Celtic Europe, or caves, as at Zimbabwe in Africa. Others were on mountaintops, on seashores, or in towns. And as some religions stretched far beyond their original cultural boundaries, spread by political or economic pressures and sometimes by persuasion, pilgrims became world travelers.

Christian and Islamic Pilgrimage

By the fourth century, Christian pilgrims were visiting Palestine from Africa, Europe, and West Asia. At shrines in Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem they sought their god's intervention for healing, children, and wealth. Some sought their god's forgiveness for past sinful acts, and later, after the eleventh century, many came from Europe to fulfill a vow. In part because of the large numbers of homeless wanderers and pilgrims on the road, it was customary Christian practice to open one's door to strangers and provide them with food and drink. Any poor or homeless person had the right and privilege to find shelter in churches. In the tenth century, Christians also traveled to shrines in Europe, most of which were either tombs of saints or churches holding the bones or other relics of saints. By this time towns had sprung up around the holy sites to provide services to the pilgrims. Guides knowing several languages, as well as restaurants and lodgings, were available in these towns. Downpatrick in Ireland, the site of a shrine to Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was one such tenth-century resort town; similar towns could be found all over Europe. In eastern Europe, Christian pilgrims more often visited monasteries, seeking mediation with God by the holy men within.

Pilgrimage was more formally structured into Islam. By the tenets of the faith, all Muslims were expected to go on pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. By the eighth century, that city was receiving thousands of pilgrims from all over West Asia during the month of pilgrimage each year. By the tenth century, still more arrived and from much farther afield: India,

West and North Africa, and Spain. Mecca became the largest pilgrimage town site in the world. Muslim pilgrims also visited the tombs of prophets in Palestine and the tombs of saints elsewhere, but in smaller numbers.

The Crusades

The crusading expeditions by which western European Christians sought to recapture Palestine were in part an outgrowth of contacts between Muslims and Christian pilgrims visiting their "Holy Land." Beginning in 1095, European Christian monarchs launched a series of eight crusades that were carried out over the next two centuries to restore Palestine to Christian control. They were initially successful and established Christian kingdoms in Palestine, but by the end of the thirteenth century their kingdoms had been lost to the Muslims.

The long-term effects of the Crusades were undoubtedly greater on Europe than on the Muslim world. Through their experiences and contacts in the eastern Mediterranean, European Crusaders were able to regain from the Arabs much knowledge that had been lost after the fall of Rome. In addition to making much Greek knowledge available to western Europe, Arab mathematics, science, and medicine were more advanced than either knowledge or practice in western Europe, and European trade and agriculture had much to learn from Arab business practices and horticulture. Common words such as algebra, alfalfa, and alcohol, and agricultural products such as oranges, nectarines, and eggplants, are examples of what Arab contact provided western Europe.

Pilgrimage in Asia: Hinduism and Buddhism

Pilgrimage was also an important religious practice throughout Asia. For Hindus, in addition to visits to temple shrines to Shiva, Vishnu, and other gods and goddesses, bathing in the seven main rivers of India, especially in the Ganges, was considered a means of sacred purification. Pilgrimage tours to several temples in succession, each of them located in different parts of India, were popular as well. Hindu pilgrimage, however, except for a few instances in Southeast Asia, was primarily limited to India proper.

Buddhists, on the other hand, took part in long-distance pilgrimages. By the first century C.E., Buddhist pilgrims from Central and Southeast Asia, as well as from all over India, regularly visited places in northern India where the Buddha had lived. By the seventh century, the Buddhist pilgrimage network had been expanded to include China, Japan, and much of Southeast Asia. Pilgrims traveled not only to India but also to temples holding relics of the Buddha in such places as Sri Lanka and Burma.

All these long-distance pilgrims returned to their societies different people than when they had left. Having completed their pilgrimage brought them a higher status and more leverage in business and social affairs; they had a greater knowledge of other peoples and cultures, their ideas and practices. Like returning modern tourists, they passed such knowledge on to their neighbors.

Chinese and Japanese Buddhist Pilgrims

Faxian, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, left for India in 399 by land and returned fifteen years later by sea. His account of this journey, the *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, is the oldest known travel book in Chinese literature and a valuable source of information on the political, social, and religious life of Central Asia, India, and the Indian Ocean lands Faxian visited. Another famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Xuan Zang (600–664), journeyed to India via Central Asia in the mid-seventh century in search of Buddhist scriptures and left an account of his travels that reveals much about Indian life at that time. *Journey to the West*, the chronicle of his trip, later became the basis of one of the most popular novels of Chinese literature.

Xuan Zang served as an important conduit between Indian and Chinese cultures, translating not only Buddhist scriptures into Chinese but also, on the order of the Chinese emperor, Chinese works such as the Daoist classic, the *Daodejing*, into Sanskrit. During the eighth century, a Chinese Buddhist monk known best by his Japanese name, Ganjin, traveled to Japan and taught Buddhism to many disciples there. In the ninth century, the Japanese monk Ennin, like his Chinese predecessors who had journeyed to India in search of the true doctrines of Buddhism, traveled to China on a pilgrimage. The account he wrote of his travels in China provides a rich source of information on China during the waning days of the Tang dynasty.

Pilgrimage, Government, and Economy

Pilgrimage as a vehicle for connecting the world also had its effect on governments and economies. Major pilgrimages such as the Muslim *hajj* were big business. Ferrying Christian pilgrims from Europe to Palestine was important to the economies of Venice, Genoa, and other southern European port towns, especially after the crusading wars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Governments along the routes took special interest in protecting—and taxing—the pilgrimage trade and services industry. They also identified themselves with the shrines within their territories and maintained old temples, churches, and mosques on the sites and built new ones. In the fifteenth century, Egypt's Mamluk government and the expanding Ottoman state in Anatolia fought over the right to claim primacy in defending Mecca

and its pilgrimage. With that claim, it was felt, came ideological supremacy in the Muslim world.

Pilgrims commonly brought along small goods and traded them to pay their way on the lengthy journey. At established international shrines, annual markets developed which sometimes became more important for the region's economy than the pilgrimage business itself. Long-distance pilgrimages, finally, meant increased traffic along established highways and, in a few instances, the building of new roads. For example, before Islam, Mecca was a way station on the Red Sea trade line. After Islam, it became a terminus of world pilgrimage and new transregional roads were built to it. Caravanserais, overnight stopping stations, were built at regular intervals on roads in the Arabian Peninsula leading to Mecca.

Pilgrimage, trade, and diplomacy accounted for nearly all of the long-distance world travelers before the fifteenth century. Missionaries such as Buddhist monks and Muslim sufis were added to these travelers. Both Buddhist and Muslim missionaries carried with them more than their faith: new technologies, different social and cultural customs, and a broader knowledge of the world were products of missionary activities.